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VILLAGE PROBLEMS AND CHARACTERISTICS

BY EDWARD T. HARTMAN,
Secretary, Massachusetts Civic League.

A village, in the sense in which we use it here, is neither grass nor hay. Its problems are radically different from those of the open country, but it has not settled itself into the well regulated ways of a proper urban development. The grass in the meadow may not at once become hay in the stack without undergoing a certain curing process to adapt it to the needs of its new environment. The village stage is the curing stage in urban development. The village problems are serious or light in proportion to their advancement toward substantial and ideal urban conditions.

Those of us who are interested in the village problem have no claims for the superiority of urban over rural conditions, but they are different, and when urban conditions commence they must be met by changed methods because of changed relationships. In the change of methods lies the seriousness of the entire village problem.

The most necessary consideration is of a sane, constructive program. This program is the same whether we live in a rural or urban environment, but when the transition from the one to the other condition begins to come, the seriousness of the problems increases and differentiation and apportionment among the items of the program become matters of pressing concern.

The complications begin in the village where the proximity of people gives to their actions and customs a more than personal significance, because they affect other people. It is here that the community is born, if it gets born on time, and that regulation of the actions of the individual by all becomes a necessity. In the failure to adopt and enforce these regulations lies the essence of village difficulties. Failure to attend to the constructive side of the community work forces need for greater and more serious activity on the remedial side; and here failure is a common condition because the very causes of failure in constructive work are still more apt to produce failure with remedial work.

The fundamental items of a constructive social program are the home, the church, the school and play and recreation. These are serious and too much neglected items in a rural program, but they assume new meanings under village and urban conditions. These new meanings first show themselves when urban conditions have their beginnings in village development. They too commonly go without proper consideration and failure in this adds to the seriousness of remedial problems, which are anyway always present through accident, failure and injustice.

The remedial items of the social program, police, courts, jails, hospitals, charity, settlements, are all going to find useful work to do even in the best regulated communities until a new era has come and decreased the amount; but their work is greatly increased through a too late attention to the constructive items, and through over-emphasis of the remedial as an end within itself.

Let us briefly consider the items of the constructive program. The home is a thing of the spirit, but it must have a physical setting. The problems of this setting, those connected with the housing problem, are greatly complicated by every step towards urban conditions. A bad house often renders a home in the true sense impossible and it adds to the seriousness of the problems of morals, health and poverty. But in the village it begins to affect other houses and the lives and property of others than those who live in it. It is here that the people as a whole must begin to regulate, through laws affecting construction and maintenance, in order that each family may have a chance for what is right and that it may be in a measure forced to what is right for the good of others.

Here the village too commonly fails. It refuses to recognize the problem till most serious conditions are self-evident. And when they become evident the village too commonly aims at developing the remedial institutions rather than at improving the home so that it may properly do its work.

And so it is with the other items, the church, the school and play and recreation. They do not soon enough functionize or they develop needless functions. The village church is too often two or three churches which struggle for existence rather than for accomplishment. The village school is too apt to educate for unfitness. The play and recreation facilities are either wanting or unsupervised, the latter being worse than the former. But there are signs of a

new era in all these respects. A recognition of the importance of the house as a constructive and preventive implement is growing, the functional development of the church is receiving attention, schools are beginning to educate for the needs of the environment rather than for the needs of some different environment, and supervised play and recreation are beginning to be developed, even in the smallest communities. This is an era of hopeful progress. The inter-play of thought between country, village and city is bringing out with constantly increasing clearness the nature of their problems, the variation of the problems under different conditions, and the relation of the various problems in the social program of the community. People are learning, too, that when the home approaches the ideal of effectiveness; when religion stands for a broad citizenship and does not tend towards community quarreling, and when our religious plants are as much used as idle; when education really leads toward something, toward mastery and the ability to do the things at hand, and when our school plants are more used than idle; when we see in play the real chance of the child to grow and in recreation as great possibilities, because of the inherent demands of humanity for recreation, as are recognized by those who have commercialized recreation, we shall then have so promoted justice, reduced accident and lessened failure, that much less is left for remedial institutions to do and that then they gradually cease to be the unhappy burden, both in energy and money expended, which they are to-day.

We can perhaps best get at the spirit of the village by considering its attitude toward certain of our remedial institutions. This attitude is not so important as that toward constructive institutions, but it is more evident. To fail to keep a boy well is not so striking to us as to fail to try to cure him when he is ill. To fail to make honesty the natural thing is to us not so serious as to fail to do something with a thief.

The village point of view toward crime is serious. Whatever the fundamental causes of a crime may be, it is most damaging for a community to fail to recognize and handle it. Failure may not be more common in villages than in cities, but failure in villages is more obvious. To illustrate:

In a certain village where live many cultured people there are many bad conditions. These conditions are, briefly, that gambling

joints run "full blast" from time to time; lewd girls, both mulatto and white, ply their trade without molestation and to the detriment of the health of many young men; the drug stores seem to sell liquor to anyone who wants it, although it is a no-license town; warrants issued for the arrest of disorderly men "have quietly *not* been served."

With this as a foreground, we find in the background a body of selectmen who say they have no authority to enforce the law in such matters, and the judge of the local court is reported as slow to act and as inclined to leniency with even old offenders.

All this prompts a citizen to send out a plea for the assistance of outsiders in the formation of a general law and order league and perhaps the establishment of a state constabulary, which would make possible the enforcement of law in the different localities in an impersonal way.

Experts consulted gave significant conclusions. One of them started his reply with this sentence: "On the question of the lying down of —, I do not know." He said more, but this is enough. Another said: "If there is any local public sentiment the matter can be reached through the local officials; if there is none the community deserves on the whole about what it gets. This constant effort to obtain good government by changing the method of procedure without getting at the root of the matter would be really amusing if it had not an element of pathos in it."

These comments are pertinent. The description of conditions might equally well be applied to many other towns. The citizens of these towns are too indifferent to make the promptings of their civic conscience amount to anything. They dislike to take action because it is unpleasant to proceed or appear against a neighbor, even though he be a bad one. The impersonal nature of law enforcement in cities makes it much easier to secure official action there than in towns. A crystallized public sentiment will produce official action. But however much we may be inclined to criticise in any particularly bad case, it remains true and always will that there are serious elements in law enforcement in villages.

A Massachusetts law of 1909 made it illegal to sell blank cartridges, toy blank cartridge pistols, fire-crackers over two inches long, etc. The enforcement was placed in the hands of the state police, who were interested and determined. The following Fourth

was like a New England Sabbath. If enforcement had been placed in local hands many violations would have occurred.

But state police cannot and ought not do everything. The curing stage must be hastened and citizens in small groups must do their duty the same as in large groups.

Failure to recognize both cause and cure for difficulties is common among villages. A citizen appealed to a private society for help. His village was small and isolated. A kitchen bar was operated for years till finally a man was employed to secure evidence, which he did, and the place was closed. That night the young hoodlums of the town painted the investigator's house black. It was not done by foreigners, for there were none, but by the sons of some of the villagers. What could they do with them? There was no playground nor any chance for proper recreation, but "the children could play everywhere." Questioning showed that they could play nowhere, for they had been arrested for playing in both streets and vacant lots. Perhaps the chief cause of the difficulty was here. As to a method of handling the immediate case, was there a probation officer? Yes, but he lived in an adjoining village, where he and the judge, whose appointment he had helped to secure and who had appointed him, held high court of mutual admiration and paid but little attention to the needs of the district.

The problem of illegal liquor-selling is common throughout the country, but it is most flagrant and injurious in villages where it is so easily obvious when it occurs and where the officers will not prosecute their neighbors and where public opinion for a like reason will not prosecute the officers. Such conditions as have been described develop or permit the development of immorality and crime which, together with the often consequent poverty, render many villages veritable beds of iniquity and misery.

This black picture stands out in marked contrast with villages where early recognition of bad conditions is followed by prompt action for prevention and cure. An interesting example of a regulation of a bad condition may be seen in one village where a college is located. By a tacit understanding a hotel keeper is allowed to sell liquor under a government license so long as he sells to no students and no minors. The procedure, while questionable, is effective. A higher development of public opinion in the same direction generally renders illegal selling a most dangerous and

unprofitable business. This is the goal to which all villages must come if they are to improve to a satisfactory degree in every part of their organism.

The spirit of this village with the restricted type of law-breaking is interestingly shown by another development brought about by its citizens. A child which was not very strong always became ill when it went to school. The mother finally looked into the matter, drew others around her and conducted an investigation. The schools were found to be badly ventilated and dusty. To handle the work effectively a school alliance was organized. The work of this alliance discovered other needs and a more comprehensive League for Social Service was the result.

Twenty-eight organizations made up the original group. Others have been added, each paying three dollars a year towards the general management. Individuals join and pay one dollar. But the function of the league is the interesting fact. Every appeal for help, wherever it may come among the groups or individuals in the league, is referred to the agent in charge, who is a trained social worker. She investigates the case and decides what should be done, referring the applicant to the organization which has previously agreed to do that particular kind of work.

In the village were found a number of families where both father and mother had to work in factories. Their children were locked in, or locked out, or otherwise left to their own devices, much to their injury. A day nursery was developed and the children are now properly cared for. A proper adjustment of our industrial system will some day enable the mother to stay at home and look after her children.

Quite a group of people, many children among them, were found to be a quarter of a mile from the village water supply. It was neglected because it would cost quite a sum of money to make the main connection and there was no leader. The league raised a fund of one hundred dollars, made the connection and supplied a few families. From these it gradually collects the costs, which will be used in extending the system till all are supplied.

Difficulties in the overseers of the poor and the school committee were remedied by pointing out where the trouble rested. Public opinion soon righted the situations.

There will be slips and failures, but this village has the right

idea and it will avoid many difficulties common to village life, even though it may make some mistakes in carrying out its work.

The purely co-operative spirit is needed to a far greater degree than may be commonly found in American villages. The people of Denmark have pointed the way and England, Scotland and Ireland are far ahead of us. Many of the most difficult and often insurmountable problems of the rural districts may be solved in the village through co-operative effort. Take such a simple matter as appliances for the sick room. Only the wealthy can afford them. It is almost out of the question to have them in the country but the cities have them in hospitals and elsewhere. What can the village do?

One village has solved the problem through the organization of a Samaritan Association. It saw the need, raised some money, purchased two hundred and twenty-one dollars worth of supplies, rented a room and employed a custodian. For over twenty years this equipment, which now invoices at nine hundred dollars, has been serving the people. When there is accident or serious illness the needed articles are loaned just as are books from a library, except that a requisition from a physician accompanies the application. Some of them help the patient and also remove much of the burden of care from the attendant wife, husband or relative. They consist of special beds and lifting chairs, wheel chairs, electric batteries, hot-water bags, ice-bags, oxygen inhaling apparatus, syringes, steam sterilizers, thermometers, window tents and similar appliances. During the first year there were seventy loans, while for 1910 there were 510 loans and 224 families were assisted.

But this is merely an illustration. What has been done in this line may be done in other lines. The sick, the home, the church, the school, the poor, the whole range of village institutions and problems may be carried much farther towards a satisfactory solution by such co-operative processes.

This suggests the question of the types of organization which can be most useful in the solution of the various community problems which naturally have their first development in villages. The ones described above are good. The main thing is that the organization have a definite objective and that this objective be fundamental. Villages have been filled with organizations many of which have proved short-lived because of the superficial nature of their

objective. Of this the village improvement society is a good example. With the best of motives it has too often tried to superimpose something upon a condition which was not adapted to the endeavor. Out-door-art is a common objective. But it is difficult, often impossible, to superimpose art upon ugliness. A proper development in the first instance would have been effective and it is often the only way to reach a satisfactory result. Organizations should therefore aim at fundamental things, at good housing, at home and school gardens, at playgrounds and even at the improvement of the work of the churches and the schools. Along with these must come work for improving governmental methods and an improved ideal as to the functions of government. A public authority can not go ahead of public opinion and private organizations are always necessary to develop this opinion so that it may support progressive authorities and stimulate to action those which are backward.

There is another group of village functions, which offers serious problems. These are streets, water, sewage disposal, garbage, lighting. Sewage and water are serious as between villages and between villages and cities. It is generally an easy matter for one village to entirely and satisfactorily dispose of its sewage, so far as it is concerned, as soon as it really makes up its mind to it. But its method, satisfactory to itself and its inhabitants, may pollute the water supply of dozens of other villages and cities. This complicates the problem for the individual village; for it must effectively rid itself of its sewage and do no harm to any other place.

Increasingly therefore must villages develop self-contained systems of sewage disposal. This may sometimes be accomplished through filtration, or by spreading the sewage upon the land. But the growth in the number of villages and the growth of the larger urban centers render a different system, such as bacteria beds, more and more imperative. This will be expensive, but nothing near so expensive as failure to do it. It therefore promises to be one of the most serious problems confronting the village of the future. It will have to receive the attention of local authorities and it is worthy of the efforts of our strongest private societies and individuals. The collective loss induced by failure will always overbalance the collective cost of doing the work properly. It is not characteristic of villages to face these things soon enough. The

result is that almost irremedial damage is constantly being done and enormous loss of life and money is the necessary cost of an effective public opinion.

At the risk of repeating let us point out again that the great need in the village is for a community consciousness. The village here suffers a severe handicap. It has problems of a serious nature and it has not the impersonal nature of law enforcement which is common in larger places. In the village a man knows all his neighbors. In the city he knows almost none of them. To do the work of the village properly there must be a fundamental understanding of the problem and a determination to work unitedly towards its solution. This calls in the village for a community sense which is different from that in the country and greater by far than that even necessary in the city.

A good way to develop this spirit is to work out elementary activities embodying the principles of team play. In the game of football, racial, credal, political and even caste differences disappear. With this example we are naturally led to the conclusion that a community enterprise along the lines of sport or recreation, something having these elements though it may have many others, will help to bring the people together, to learn to work together. When they learn it in one way it is an easy step to use it in another way.

The village pageant is a good example. Its success as a whole depends upon the successful working out and performance of its most minute parts. It has been and is being used with the best of results. It varies from a general celebration of the Fourth, so developed that the whole village comes into its activities, to formal pageants recounting the history of the village or illustrating the evolution of education, religion or politics. This movement promises to lead us into new ways of life, to give an impetus to literature, to dignify recreation and to give us that community consciousness which will solve our practical village problems. It will at every point put us on a higher plane.

A quotation from the introductory statement on the program of a recent village pageant of games and dances will let us at once into the spirit of the movement:

"These singing games and dances are now the games of children or of peasant maidens. When the world was younger they were the amusement of courtly dames and of finished gentlemen.

Some of them have been played by Egyptians and Aryans, Greeks and Romans, and some, before they were games, had their basis in ceremonial rites and customs. Long ago the children, after the manner of children everywhere, copied in play what their elders performed in sober earnest, and through the centuries the child of twelve taught the child of six the same words and actions it had learned from its playmates. From land to land games and rhymes diffused and descended till they reached the age of printed books and countless libraries, an age of haste and unremitting toil in factory and mill. There they perished and to-day we glean but a few scattered and unregarded fragments of the past store.

"But we still have with us the spring, the season of expectation, and the autumn with its ripened harvest. May we not hope that when the world has become used to its new tools, and their perfection has lightened the burden of toil, the spirit of joy will again return and express itself in forms old and new."

As the child grows through its play, more than through any of its other activities, so, it seems, we may look to the play of communities for a source, perhaps the best one, of growth which will help to solve community problems. With the community as with the child, the period of play is a period of receptivity, of frankness, of open-mindedness. It is not too much to say that no discussion of the dry bones of government, and no adoption of any articulation of them, will ever do as much for our villages as these harmless, helpful, moulding activities which lead village people out of self-consciousness and selfishness into the spirit which sees, appreciates and adopts.

It is the spirit rather than the content of law which rules among honest people. The villager must therefore develop the spirit of law, the spirit of usefulness rather than harmfulness to the neighbor which changed conditions have brought into close physical relationship with him. For this spirit, which little needs to exist in the country and which can hardly exist in the city, is absolutely essential to the village.

If our interpretation is accurate the village may have something which is hardly to be found in any other state of society. It must have it if it is to succeed. The development of it is the essence of the village problem.